

New Railways of Turkey---System Planned to Develop Asia Minor---Road to Mecca and Its Pilgrim Cars---Over Holy Places



THE BEDOONS OF THE DESERT OBJECT TO THE RAILWAYS, THEY SAY IT INJURES THE CARAVAN TRAFFIC.



GUARDING THE RAILROAD IN THE ARABIAN DESERT.

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.
Beirut.

The Turkish empire is on the edge of a railway development. More than 4,000 miles of road have already been built, and lines are planned which will eventually connect Constantinople with Mecca and Medina, which will open up the rich plains of Asia Minor, and going down to Baghdad, make the valley of the Euphrates equal as a wealth producer to the valley of the Nile. Since I landed in Syria I have traveled over much of its railroads. My first trip was from the port of Jaffa up the mountains of Judea to the city of Jerusalem. My second was on the Mecca road from the lower end of the Sea of Galilee through the great plains of the Hauran to Damascus, and my last was from Damascus over the mountains of Lebanon to this port of Beirut on the Mediterranean Sea. During the latter trip I went from Rayak, in the valley of Lebanon between the two ranges of mountains, along the road which has been built northward through Coele-Syria to Aleppo, which

will probably connect with the Baghdad line.

The Railway to Mecca.

All of these roads are comparatively new, and some are still building. The Mecca line now runs as far south as Medina, where Mohammed came after his flight from Mecca, and where his tomb is. Medina has something like forty thousand people, and it is one of the most fanatical of the Moslem centres. It will be the chief stopping place on the way to Mecca.

Mecca lies about two hundred and fifty miles still farther south, and the track is being laid toward that point. There are two Christian civil engineers in the surveying party, but the people are so intolerant that the engineers are kept hidden the greater part of the time and do their work inside the tents. They are not allowed to spy out the land, to see or be seen.

The Bedouins are now causing the contractors considerable trouble. The road will take a large part of the pilgrimage traffic, and this, it has been estimated, is worth to Arabia something like ten million dollars a year.

Much of the money goes to the owners of the camels and the leaders of the caravans. These men have been employed in the construction and in supplying the other laborers with food. Now that the line is nearing its completion, the Bedouins have lost their jobs. They are objecting to the railway and have torn up the tracks in many places. They are opposed by the soldiers of the Turkish government, and the result is a great unrest which may cause a revolution.

Pilgrim Cars.

The traffic on the Constantinople-Damascus and Mecca railways will largely be made up of pilgrims on their way to worship at Mecca and Medina. As it is now, with nothing but camels to carry them, it is estimated that something like four hundred thousand go there every year, and it is believed that the railway will increase the traffic from 50 to 100 per cent. Christians and other unbelievers will not be carried on the pilgrim trains, although they may make tours to Petra and other parts of Arabia.

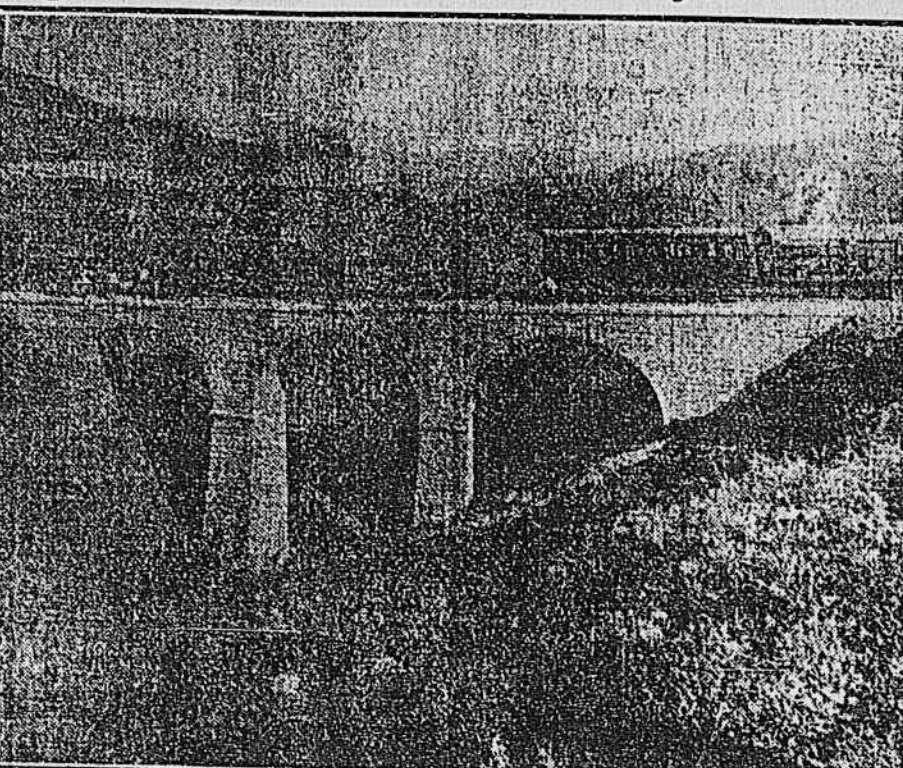
This Mecca railway will have special accommodations for Mohammedans. Certain of the carriages will be fitted up as mosques, so that the travelers may perform their devotions during the journey. The praying carriages will be luxuriously furnished. The floors will be covered with Persian carpets and around the sides will be painted verses from the Koran in letters of gold. A chart will indicate the direction of Mecca, so that one can always turn his head the right way when he prays, and there will also be a minaret on the top of the car, six and a half feet high. These cars, I am told, are being built at Constantinople.

The Mecca road is a narrow-gauge, with French rolling stock. The material has been imported from Europe, the ties being of iron to withstand the white ants, which eat anything of wood. One of the great difficulties of construction has been the lack of water. The road goes for long stretches through the desert, and much of the trains carry tanks to supply the engine.

By Rail to Damascus.

I traveled over a part of this Mecca road on my way from the Holy Land north to Damascus. Leaving Tiberias in the early morning, I was roved by four lusty Syrians across the Sea of Galilee to Samach, which is the station on the lower end of that sea and the place where the branch line runs off to Haifa. From there northward we skirted the east side of the Sea of Galilee, passing the hills upon which our Saviour preached and where He drove the devils into the swine. We rode up almost as large as the Jordan, which loses itself in the Jordan farther south. We climbed the foothills of Lebanon, and at about three thousand feet above the surface of the Sea of Galilee reached the rich plain of the Hauran, the great bread basket of the Bedouins. It grows wheat and other grain, and the land near the track was covered with poppies, golden daisies and wild red hollyhocks. We could see Bedouin camps everywhere. They are made up of brown tents five or six feet high and are so low that the people have to stoop to get in. Outside each little settlement was an inclosure for the stock, and on the lands nearby cattle and camels were grazing. As we traveled we could see great flocks of black goats feeding on the sides of the Lebanon mountains, and the land to the cliffs, and looked much like flies on the wall. There were also droves of black cattle, and many flocks of white sheep, each carrying a tall of the size of a sofa pillow, which hung down like an apron, half hiding its legs.

The cars were crowded with Turks, Syrians and Bedouins, but on the advice of a friend I gave the conductor a dollar, and in return had a compartment all to myself. Baksheesh will do anything in Syria. As Shammas, my guide, puts it: "The frame is the wheel upon which the world goes round."



CONSTRUCTION TRAIN ON THE RAILWAY TO MECCA.

RAILWAY STATION IN THE LEBANON MOUNTAINS.

Stealing Over Holy Places.

It seems almost sacrilegious to travel by rail in the footsteps of the Bible. The iron tracks now cover the pathways of the prophets, and the ghosts of the saints may be roused by the shriek of the locomotive. This road to Damascus, beginning with the branch line to Haifa, skirts the edge of Mount Carmel, where Elijah lived, and it then goes on to Damascus over a route which was probably traveled by Abraham, David and Solomon, and by St. Paul when he was blinded by the great light and warned not to kick against the pricks.

The road to Jerusalem goes over the plains where the Israelites fought with the Philistines, through the country of Samson, which I have already described and near the place where David with his little band of men slew the giant Goliath.

A railway from Damascus to Beirut shows you Mount Hermon, so famed in the Psalms, and passes numerous places which, according to the Mohammedans, were the homes and tombs of the prophets. Take, for instance, Suk Wadi Barada, a little valley oasis made up of flat-roofed mud houses, surrounding by orchards and vineyards, on the way to Baalbek. It is mentioned by Josephus and is referred to in St. Luke as the home of the tetrarch Lysanias. The Mohammedans say that Adam lived in the mountain which looks down upon it, and that it was near the oasis itself that Cain became jealous of Abel and slew him.

According to the Moslem tradition Cain was thereupon filled with remorse. He did not know what to do with his dead brother, and he took the body on his back and carried it with him over the world for 500 years. At the end of that time he returned to this mountain, where he saw two birds fighting. At last one killed the other and it then washed and buried the slain. Cain did likewise with the body of his brother, and there sprang up seven oak trees, which are pointed out to this day.

High Passenger Rates.

The distance from Damascus to Beirut is ninety-one miles, and the first-class fare is nearly \$5, or more than 5 cents per mile. By second class it costs over 3 cents, and on the third class or the mixed train it is less. Travelers are recommended not to take

the third class, and ladies should always go first. The first class has compartments eight feet wide running across the cars at right angles with the engine. Each compartment has two cushioned benches facing each other, its sides are walled with windows and there is a door at each end. The conductor does not go through the cars, but collects the tickets from the outside, walking along a step running the full length of each car and holding to an iron bar which is fastened to the outside some distance from the top.

The road is picturesque and gives magnificent views of the Lebanon mountains. The track winds its way up and down the hills, and the western side of the range is so steep that the cars are taken up on coops, after the same manner as on Pike's Peak, Mount Washington and the Rigi. There are twenty-five stations, mostly two-story buildings of stone.

The passengers are made up of the conglomerate mixture of humanity found in this part of the Orient. There are scores of Syrians in long coats and trousers, some wearing red fez caps, and others having turbans or hankkerchiefs wrapped around their heads. There are Turkish officers in uniform, with swords at their sides, fez-capped boys in silk gowns, and other Moslems in turbans and gowns. There are Mohammedan women clad all in black and wearing black veils. There are pretty Greek girls, with bare faces, brown-skinned women from the mountains, and Bedouins, who have ropes tied about the necks which half shroud their fierce features. There are also Persians, Druses and Christians of all sorts and conditions.

The trains go slowly in climbing the mountain. The average express makes less than sixteen miles an hour, and the mixed train takes twelve hours for the ninety-one miles.

By Rail to Baghdad.

One of the chief subjects of discussion in the Turkish empire at present is the opening up of the rich Valley of the Euphrates. This is the region in which Babylon and Nineveh flourished, and it has some of the best lands on the face of the globe. It has been suggested that it was the original site of the Garden of Eden, and it is now reached only by the rivers and the Persian Gulf, and there are no connections with the rest of the world except by caravan. The caravan trade now takes goods to Damascus, from where they go to the Mediterranean Sea over the road I have just mentioned.

One of the newest schemes is a railway from Damascus to Hit, a town on the Euphrates River, and another is one which connects with the railroads of Smyrna and Constantinople, and to Adam. The latter crosses the country above Aleppo and strikes the Tigris at Mosul, running down that river to Baghdad. The road from Damascus to Hit would be only about one-third as long. It is backed by the British, who have a great irrigation scheme for the plains of Mesopotamia. It is headed by Sir William Wilcocks, who has gone over the ground, and is pushing the matter in London. Sir William Wilcocks is the engineer who built the great Nile dam at Assuan, which has redeemed about 7,000,000 acres in Egypt.

His scheme includes irrigation works in the plains of Mesopotamia, and also a navigable canal from Baghdad, on the Tigris, to a point on the Euphrates, just below Hit. This would save seventy-five miles of travel, and would make Hit the terminus, with the rivers of the Tigris and Euphrates to draw from as water transportation routes. It is claimed that this road would pay largely from the freight traffic, and that it would have also a large paying passenger business. The Mohammedans, who annually go from Persia to Mecca, it would get many passengers who now travel by the Suez canal to India. When the present system is completed, they could go from Paris to Constantinople by rail and thence by this route to Hit and Baghdad, from where they could steam on to the Persian Gulf and across to India.

It is claimed that the line will not cost more than \$20,000,000 per mile, or about \$3,000,000 from Damascus to Hit.

The German Road to the Tigris.

The other road which is planned to go to Baghdad itself is the one backed by the Germans. A concession for it was granted by the Sultan in 1902 and a part of the line has already been built. The headquarters of the road is in Switzerland and bonds for a part of it have already been issued. The idea now is to begin the work at several different points. The route has been divided up into sections of one hundred and twenty-four miles each. One of these will be started at Baghdad and more eastward; another will begin at Bulghurli, the end of the present line in Asia Minor, and will go to Adana, and then on toward the east. The climate of the Adana plains is such that the construction can be continued this winter, and the same is true of the Euphrates valley. This syndicate is managed by the Deutsche Bank of Berlin; the Imperial Ottoman Bank of Paris; the Wiener Bank and the Societe du Credit Suisse, of Zurich.

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The Opening Up of the Turkish Empire.

The importance of these railway schemes cannot be overestimated. The new government has planned the development of Asiatic Turkey, a country which is ten times as big as New England and as well populated as Minnesota. In addition to the projects above mentioned is the Chester Railway concession, which has been granted to Admiral Chester, a retired officer of our navy, and which now only awaits the ratification of Parliament. This involves the building of 1,500 miles of new lines covering the richest parts of Armenia, Kurdistan and Mosul, and embracing the upper portions of Mesopotamia. The road will begin at the Mediterranean and will run across Asia Minor to Persia, with numerous branches. It includes also the development of a country through which it goes and the opening up of a rich mineral region.

As to the resources to be developed by these new roads, they are beyond description enormous. They include the coalfields of the Black Sea and mineral lands which have not yet been prospected. Asia Minor is rich agriculturally. The plains of Mesopotamia will raise anything that can be grown in Egypt, and the new irrigation schemes will make them as productive as they were when Nebuchadnezzar was reigning at Babylon. In ancient times that country had a population of over 6,000,000. It has not one-fourth as many to-day. I am told that cotton will grow not only there, but also throughout Asia Minor, and it may be that one of the chief competitors of our Southern plantations will eventually be found in this now almost waste but exceedingly rich part of the world.

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